

JC & ME

RELATIONS

all this fuss over the Pope and garbage got me thinking about why I am not a believer. Born into a family of lax Anglicans, I was made aware at an early age that our clan's religion exists only because Henry VIII wanted a divorce. That seemed a poor excuse for a religion, even to a six-year-old.

Just in case, we were forced to go to Sunday school for one interminable year. My father grumbled that it wasn't his idea of a day off as he was made to wear a tie on Sunday and drive our small, unruly band of heathens to church. He snored through the sermon while we fidgeted in the basement.

"Jesus has no balls," my sister sniggered at the anatomically incorrect rendering of the King of Kings. I knew then we were beyond saving. The Sunday school charade ended when the vicar ran away with a parishioner's wife.



**KATE
BARKER**

"Thou shalt not screw thy neighbor's wife," we heard dad whisper to mum as he ripped off his tie on that last sacred Sunday. "Hypocritical bastard."

"What's a hypocrite?" I wanted to know. I already knew what bastard meant.

Religion took a back seat for many years, until I entered the independent school system and became familiar with the Anglican hymnal and book of psalms. I had an immediate appreciation for the literature, if not for the message. Blake's imagery in Jerusalem appeal to any angst-ridden 14-year-old.

"And was Jerusalem builded here, among these dark satanic mills." Cool stuff. Decidedly less cool were the insipid hymns like "Jesus Loves Me."

Around this time, a good friend found the Lord. My parents acted as though she had discovered heroin. I asked my mother about it, as my friend's actions had become increasingly mysterious and disconcerting. She voluntarily engaged in something called Bible study on weekends. My mother looked grim.

"Darling" — she only ever said darling when something troubled her — "Darling, she has found religion." Heavy sigh. "Let's just hope she grows out of it."

My friend ditched Jesus because of me. I'm rather proud of that. She couldn't accept that I was damned, simply because I'm gay, so she told them all to go and find Jesus without her. Last she heard, they were still looking.

Believing gives comfort to many, and I don't begrudge anyone their faith. I even flirted with the idea of a saviour around the time my friend was hunting down Christ. I attended confirmation classes and went through with the ceremony. My chief recollection of this holy event was embarrassment as my chapel veil slid off my head when everyone else's stayed piously put. I also tripped on the long walk back from the bishop's blessing and fell head first, inelegantly into the lap of another child's proud parent.

My parents were neither elegant nor proud, but were hiding somewhere at the back of the chapel. My father took the opportunity to laugh, loudly, in church, something he had been forbidden to do since boyhood.

My foray into Jesus' flock wasn't helped by my father's contempt. According to him, two things cause most of the world's bloodshed: patriotism and religion.

"Any goddamned religion!" he added for emphasis. I conceded his point. So it was that I was welcomed into the arms of the church at 14 and immediately looked for the exit sign.

The confirmation classes and mandatory morning chapel attendance have, however, served me well. I am armed in the ammunition of the Bible thumpers. I have a particular fondness for quoting St Paul, the misogynist, in his letters to the Corinthians as defence of my kind: "And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."